

متى



when

notes for a bayān given at the ʾIslāmīc Study Center

by

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ
وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

wa-l-takun minkum ʿummatun yadʿūna ʿila-l-khayri
wa yaʿmurūna bi-l-maʿrūfi wa yanhawna ʿani-l-munkar;
wa ʿūlaʿika humu-l-muflihūn

“Let there arise from you a community inviting to all that is good,
enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong:
they are the ones to attain success.”

(Sūrah ʿAl ʿImrān 3:104)



“Can’t you see that the truth is not followed and the falsehood is not
shunned? In such circumstances a believer should desire to meet
Allāh. Surely I regard death as nothing but an honour and life with
oppressors (*dhālimīn*/ظالمين) as anything but disgrace.” al-Ḥusayn ؑ
in his first talk at Karbalāʾ (*Tārīkh at-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7 p.300)



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The Prophet ﷺ said: “There will come a time for my people when there will remain nothing of the Qur’ān except its outward form and nothing of ʿIslām except its name and they who will call themselves by this name will be the people furthest from it. The *masājid* will be full of people but will be empty of goodness. The Jurists (*fuqahā*) of that day will be the most evil religious leaders under the heavens; sedition and dissension will go out from them and to them will it return.” (Narrated by ʿAlī ؓ recorded by al-Bayhaqī in *al-Mishkāt Kitabu-l-ʿIlm* chapter 3, p. 38 and *Kanzu-l-ʿUmmal*, chapter 6, p. 43).



Bashār al-ʿAssad praying with the Syrian ʿUlemā during the 2011/2 Uprising



Saad Hariri, Saudi-Lebanese billionaire, flanked by Lebanese ʿulemāʾ.

When?



Hamsa Yusuf Hanson at Bush's 9/11 State of the Union Address



Egyptian cleric Muhammad Zoghbi calls for the Shaykh of Azhar and the Mufti of Egypt to be replaced by political appointees.



Supreme Leader °Alī Khamenei, °Aḥmadīnājād with some fuqahā°

When?

Until this final period comes, the religion (*Dīn*) will become a stranger, the same way it started in Makkah, a stranger to its masters and servants, the powerful and the weak, its women and children.

Those who try to change the prevailing situation were called *ghurabā'* or strangers by the Prophet ﷺ. It is they who will carry this religion (*Dīn*) with knowledge, sound comprehension and determination. They will willingly sacrifice their well-being, facing hardships, and persecution, with patience and steadfastness. It is they who will follow the advice of the Prophet ﷺ given in this ḥadīth:

“People used to ask the Prophet ﷺ about the good times, but I used to ask him about (the) bad times fearing lest they overtake me. I said, ‘Oh Rasullullāh, we were in the midst of ignorance and evil, and then Allāh ﷻ brought us this good (time through ‘Islām). Is there a bad time after this?’ He said, ‘Yes!’ I asked, ‘Will there then be a good time again after that bad time?’ He said, ‘Yes, but in it will be a hidden evil.’ I asked, ‘What will be the evil hidden therein?’ He said, ‘(That time will witness the rise of) the people who will adopt ways other than mine and seek guidance other than mine. You will know good points as well as bad points.’ I asked, ‘Will there be a bad time after this good one?’ He said, ‘Yes. (A time will come) when there will be people standing and inviting at the gates of Hell. Whosoever responds to their call, they will throw them into the fire.’

I said, ‘Oh Rasullullāh describe them to us.’ He said, ‘They will be a people having the same complexion as ours and speaking our language,’ I said, ‘Oh Rasullullāh, what do you suggest if I happen to live in their time?’ He said, ‘Stick to the *Jam‘ah* and its ‘Imām.’ I said, ‘If there is no *Jam‘ah* and there is no ‘Imām?’ He said, ‘Separate yourself from every faction, though you may have to eat the roots of trees until death comes to you and you are in this state.’” Narrated by Hudhaifa ibn al-Yaman in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim

Narrated Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri رضى الله عنه: “The Messenger ﷺ said: ‘Soon a Muslim’s best property will be sheep which he takes to the top of mountains and the places where the rain falls, fleeing with his religion from *fitnah* (civil strife).’” ‘Abū Dāwūd, Book 30, No. 4254 and al-Bukḥari, Volume 8, Book 76, Number 502) [Arabic: *ya’ti ‘ala-n-nāsi zamanun khayru mali-l-rajuli-l-muslim...*]



When?

“The Prophet ﷺ said that in time, °Islām will become worn out like clothes are, until there will be no one who knows what fasting, prayer, charity and the rituals are. The Qur’ān will disappear in one night, and no °āyāt will be left on earth. Some groups of old people will be left who will say, ‘We heard our fathers saying *lā °ilaha°illa-llāh*, so we repeated it.’ Silah asked Hudhayfah, ‘What good will saying *lā °ilaha°illa-llāh* do for them when they do not know what ṣalāt, ṣawm, zakāt and the rituals are?’” Hudhayfah ignored him; then Silah repeated his question three times, and each time Hudhayfah ignored him. Finally he answered, “O Silah, it will save them from Hell”, and said it three times. Narrated by Ibn Majah

“The Prophet ﷺ said, “°Islām began as something strange, and it will go back to being strange as it was in the beginning, so good tidings (*tūba*) for the strangers.’ Someone asked, ‘Who are the strangers?’ He said, ‘The ones who break away from their tribes (*qabā’il* القبائل) for the sake of °Islām.’” Ibn Majah on the authority of °Anas.

The strangers (*al-ghurabā’* الغرباء) are the ones of whom the Prophet ﷺ said, “They are a small group of people among a large evil population. Those who oppose them are more numerous than those who follow them.” He ﷺ also said that the strangers are, “Those who correct the people when they become corrupt.” They are steadfast until Allāh ﷻ brings about His Decree, the Hour (*as-sā’ah* الساعة).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

°inna-llāha lā yughayyiru mā bi-qawmin
ḥatta yughayyirū mā bi-°anfusiḥim

truly Allāh does not change a people
until they change what is in themselves

(Sūratu-r-Ra’d 13:11)



Many reverts to °Islām will tell you about feeling as if they were strangers, before finding °Islām. They will speak of feeling that they belonged somewhere else, that their lives were always off center. They often speak about a vague sense of knowing they were not like everyone else around them; feeling like strangers in a strange land. Returning to °Islām gives one a sense of coming home, of finally being normal, even if it is sometimes still in a strange land.

When?

It does not take long, though, before some reverts, after the tenth pot luck dinner in the communal hall of some masjid or a rented hall at the Elks club of dry biryani and cold macaroni and the endless questions of “Why did you become a Muslim” or “Do you know that we Muslims pray five times a day?” or “Do you know that we Muslims don’t eat pork or drink alcohol? etc” or “Tell us the truth. Are you really a spy for the FBI or are you with ICE or Homeland Security?” begin to feel that they are still strangers and they start to wonder if this feeling of never quite being at ease, or at home, will ever end. Some conclude that it will not, at least not until they are in their true home the Garden (*al jannah*/الجنة) – the Paradise (*firdaws*/فردوس).

This feeling is not restricted to reverts; often those who were born into the religion of ʾIslām feel a sense of not belonging, of being out of place, of not fitting in, of being somehow strange. This is especially true if they are committed, practicing and strong Muslims.

Such reverts or regular Muslims are not the first or only Muslims to ponder strangeness. The first Muslims in Makkah must have looked at their family members and wondered why they just couldn’t see the truth. Why didn’t they see that Muḥammad ﷺ was a Prophet and ʾIslām was the truth? Finding and accepting the truth is a wonderful blessing but often the feeling of strangeness remains.

The strangeness we feel is no doubt a sensation shared by the prophets and messengers ﷺ before Muhammad ﷺ. Nūḥ عليه السلام called to his people for 950 years and was continually ridiculed. ʾIbrahim عليه السلام was thrown into the fire, Lūt عليه السلام and Yūnus عليه السلام, were abused, persecuted and humiliated. Mūsā عليه السلام was rejected, not only by Pharaoh, but also by his own people when they dismissed his call and worshipped the golden calf. ʿIsā عليه السلام and his disciples were ridiculed in their own land and by their fellow Jews and must surely have felt the same strangeness that we feel today

The sense of being a stranger can be said to be one of the first steps in the understanding of ‘when’ – and I emphasize here this is an early phase and not an end phase – but certainly a necessary phase.

What you must know is that none of what appears to be *it* really is.

Without knowing that you *are* a stranger, whether as a Sunni, or Shīʿī, or Ṣūfī, or Salafī, or Jaʿfirī, or Shāfiʿī, or Mālikī, or Ḥanafī, or Ḥanbalī, or ʾIkḥwanī or Waḥḥabī or whatever it is you think you are, in the end who you don’t really know who you really are.

When?

Until you learn this lesson you cannot really begin to speak of entering into spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqqah*). Everything else is spiritual materialism no matter how orthodox; no matter how seemingly exalted. In this concluding essay in the five part series at the Islamic Study Center devoted to the subjects of Who, What, Why, Where and When, I may be stepping on some toes, because you cannot really come to understand this subject until you get right down to the core of your identification as a Muslim and confront a lot of issues that often remain buried, swept under the rug or not spoken about.

When Ibn ʿArabī ﷺ comments in one of his books that even if you see a group of men standing in prayer you cannot be sure that any of them are really praying to Allāh ﷻ as Allāh ﷻ really *is* but usually, and for the most part, they are praying to an Allāh made up almost entirely by their own invention and in their own imaginations.

There is a well known ḥadīth:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ آدَمَ عَلَى صُورَتِهِ
ʾinna-llaha kḥalaqa ʾadam ʿakā šūratihī
Truly Allāh created ʾĀdam on his form,



For whatever reason many who read this ḥadīth read it as:

Truly Allāh created ʾĀdam on His form,

They prefer or profess to understand that the ḥadīth means that human beings are created in the form of Allāh ﷻ rather than human beings are created on the form of their own being or — ʾĀdam ﷺ.

The Jews (Genesis 2) and Christians are confused on this issue and so, in their imaginations (*waḥm*/وهـم), are many Muslims who share their view that “Man is created in the likeness of G-d.”

However in the phrase ʿala šūratihī (على صورته), *šūrah*, in the context that it is used, refers, in the Arabic language, not to the human being created in the form of G–d but, rather, the human being who is created in *his* own unique form.

As a robin is always a robin, an eagle always an eagle, a salmon always a salmon and a whale always a whale, an oak tree always an oak tree and a palm tree always a palm tree, a rose is a rose is a rose and a tulip is a tulip not a rose so each *genus* is created in its own unique form as the human being is created in its own unique form.

When?

Shaykh Abu °Alī Sina, (Avicenna) in the part of his book *ash-Shifā°* on metaphysics, says: “*Ṣūrah* (form) is applied to something by virtue of which matter is sustained in actuality; hence the intellectual substances (*jawāhir °aqliyyah*) and accidents cannot be called *ṣūwār* (forms/صور). *Ṣūrah* is a word or term applied to the species (نوع), *genus*, and *differentia* of a thing.”

On a more subtle, which is to say less physical, level, Ibn °Ajībah writes in the explanation of this ḥadīth (*al-Mabaḥith al-Asliyyah*, line 22): “And the reality of the human has a pattern in the Divine.” Thus the meaning of the ḥadīth “Allāh created °Ādam in His image” is that in creation Allāh ﷻ gave °Ādam ﷺ attributes that in a way resemble His own attributes. And these attributes are the [seven] attributes of meaning [e.g., life, power, knowledge, will over his actions, hearing, seeing, and speech].

So while there may be something in imagining that we are created in the Image of Allāh ﷻ, it is only in the sense of attributes rather than in the sense of any physical reality, let alone ‘form’.

But to return to what Ibn °Arabī ﷺ is speaking about, it is the propensity of human beings to attribute to themselves the characteristics of Allāh ﷻ or to imagine that they themselves in some way resemble Allāh ﷻ, even when we know He says that He is:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِ شَيْءٍ

laysa kamithlihi shay°un

not like any thing

(Sūratu-sh-Shūra 42:11)

An extreme example of this propensity is the sect of the so-called Five Percenters, who say that the word Allāh means (thinking the word “A-L-L-A-H “ is written in English) arm, leg, leg, arm, head. and so they conceive of Allāh ﷻ as being *exactly* like a human.

But again, what is important in all of this is to understand that no matter what you may see or imagine people are doing, since you cannot see what is going on inside of them, you do not know what is really happening in them. So people may appear to be praying to Allāh ﷻ, but in reality they may be praying to some idea they have of themselves, and even beyond that debasement of the act of worship (°ibadah/عبادة) is that the Allāh ﷻ that people believe they are worshipping is not even the Allāh ﷻ that actually and truly *IS*.

When?

The point behind all of this, and what we are trying to clarify, is the ability of people to fool themselves, even at the highest and most sublime reaches of consciousness. Of course since actions are in accord with intention (al-Bukḥarī), the people who are praying will receive the *‘ājir* (أجر) or reward for their *ṣalāt*, but that *‘ājir*, and the *ṥhawāb* (ثواب) connected to it is tempered, of course, by their lack of awareness or what we might better call mindlessness (*ghaflah*/غفلة).

The importance of this will be apparent further on in this bayān (بيان) when we will be writing about the vision of the Hidden ‘Imām ؑ within the self, but that is to get ahead of ourself.

What we are talking about here is first of all the apprehension of strangeness and the understanding that one is a stranger.

And not just the apprehension but the deep necessity for this understanding, coupled with the knowledge that it is very easy for us to fool ourselves and imagine things to be that are not.

This business of fooling ourselves even to the point of imagining things about Allāh ﷻ is an insidious trap that many fall into and wind up losing a lot of time on the spiritual journey involved with things that are not so, even though they may appear to be, as in the case of the people who think they are praying to Allāh ﷻ but are really only praying to figments of their own imaginations.

If this is not clearly and deeply understood, one is truly at great risk. Let us then say that one has deeply interiorized this idea of strangeness, or one may also call it bewilderment (*ḥayrah*/حيرة).

Sīdī Abū al-‘Abbās Mursī ؑ said:

“Oh you who go astray in the understanding of your own secret,

Look, for you shall find in yourself the whole of existence;

You are the Infinite, seen as the Way and seen as the Truth,

Oh you who are the synthesis of the Divine Mystery in Its Totality.”

For those whose spiritual station (*maqam*) is extinction (*fanā’*), each of the divine qualities are but the Essence (*dhāt*) of Allāh ﷻ, for when these souls are extinguished in Allāh ﷻ, they contemplate His Essence only; they no sooner contemplate It, than they see nothing outside of It; and this is why they are called *dhātīyūn* (essential). Now the Divine Essence possesses such infinitude, such beauty and goodness that even the most perfect intelligences among the elect (*kḥāṣṣ*) are bewildered, to say nothing of the majority (*‘āmm*).

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It becomes so subtle and so fine that It vanishes because of excess of subtlety and fineness; and in that state, It says to Itself; My Infinitude, My Beauty, My Goodness, My Splendour, My Penetration, My Elevation, My Exaltation knows no bounds. Thus It is unmanifested. But the Infinite is not infinite unless it is at the same time unmanifested and manifested, subtle and solid, near and distant, having simultaneously the qualities of beauty and severity, and so forth; now, when Essence wished to manifest all this, It wondered (while knowing quite well): How shall I manifest it? And It answered Itself: I shall reveal and veil Myself at the same time; and this is what It did. Hence the essences of things, or more exactly, the forms which, as such, are present or absent, subtle or solid, higher or lower, near or distant, spiritual or sensory, merciful or terrible. These are all Essence, or, if you prefer, forms in which the Beauty of the Essence is manifested, although they are unable to manifest the Essence as such, since in Itself there is nothing but Itself alone and there is nothing outside of It.

[From the *Rasā'il* (Letters) of Mawlāy al-°Arabī ad-Darqāwī ﷺ]

What is happening here is that people who have reached the state of understanding both the strangeness of what surrounds them, and the fact that they are strangers as well, often begin to go astray, as the shaykh says, in the understanding of their own secret.

Perhaps the veil parts (*tajalīyāt*/تجليات) for just a second and in that second they catch a glimpse of another reality, since the reality in which they are living has become unreal or 'strange' to them.

It is for this reason that we tried to make clear earlier the necessity of this idea of strangeness, because as long as everything is familiar then it goes on just being the same and there is no real incentive to change or seek anything different, because it all is as it is and as it was and as it will continue to be and everything is in its place.

In other words things are what they are supposed to be. Everything looks like its supposed to look like and people are as they are and life simply goes on and on and one believes that that *is* what life is.

To try to explain what is hard to explain, I could say it is a little like that part of the book, *Through the Looking Glass*, in which Alice is playing with a white kitten whom she calls "Snowdrop" and a black kitten whom she calls "Kitty".

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While she is playing one evening with the kittens she ponders what the world might be like on the other side of a mirror's reflection. Climbing up on the mantelpiece of the fireplace, she pokes at the mirror hung on the wall above the fireplace and discovers, to her surprise, that she is able to step through it into another world and, stepping through the mirror, she leaves her house where it had been a cold and snowy night and enters a sunny spring garden.

That is something we could all think of as being truly *strange*.

Things there are not what they were or are not what they are.

Perhaps that is too far a stretch and we need to look at something more contemporary, like the crashing of a plane into the Pentagon.

Everyone knows that happened. Everyone saw it on TV – right?

Wrong! It never was on TV. Like Bush Lite saying he had seen the first plane fly into the Twin Towers on the TV which was of course, impossible because it wasn't until a day later that that footage 'emerged'. But he was already convinced that he had seen it when in truth no one had seen it though later on everyone saw it. Right.

Back to the Pentagon.

They tell us a story of a plane that flew into it and the very first thing they showed us on TV is this picture of the crash scene:



When?

And everyone accepts that until some wiseguy says. “Hey wait a second! Planes have wings and a tail. All I see is a hole in a wall.”

Then questions begin. How did this 757 flown by a failed student pilot descend from some 20,000 feet in a graceful curve across six lanes of traffic and wind up flying into the Pentagon without hitting any lights or trees or even singeing the “No Parking” sign posted on the wall, neither leaving any debris from the engines (titanium, one of the hardest and strongest substances known to man), nor tearing up the lawn, and not a sign of the wings (125 feet across) or the tail (44 feet up) or the engines and the hole is just that — a hole?¹

Well some people don’t want to think about that, and as I wrote earlier, people like things to be what they are supposed to be. Everything should look like its supposed to look and we all *know* that that Flight 77 flew into the Pentagon because we all saw it on TV.

But we didn’t – and some of us know we didn’t – and for us who know we didn’t the world *is* indeed an exceedingly strange place and once anyone comes to really know that no plane ever flew into the Pentagon the world becomes a very strange place indeed.

And that’s what I mean about strange and that is why I say that the first step in understanding “WHEN” is understanding strangeness.

You have stepped into the Looking Glass World and once in, its very hard to get out.

So now hopefully everyone who has read this or listened to it understands what I mean by strange, stranger and strageness.

Now I want to talk a bit about another ‘hijacking’ or maybe a better phrase might be, the ‘counterfeiting’ of ‘Islam both in relationship to the *sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ and to certain phenomenon we can easily observe in what is call the “Muslim” world of today.

I apologize in advance for stepping on anyone’s toes, as that is not my objective, but certain things must be said even though I know we are not supposed to talk about these things.

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1. For those who may be interested, the size of a Boeing 757 is approximately 125ft in width, 155ft. in length and 44½ft. in height. The minimum take-off weight, according to the Boeing website, is 200,000 pounds, “as much as a diesel train locomotive.” The titanium engines, alone, depending on whether they were Rolls Royce or Pratt Whitney engines, weigh between 7100 and 7300 lbs. each and virtually indestructible. The real question is how does a plane 125 ft. wide fit into a hole which is only 60 ft. across?

When?

The First Fitnah (*fitnat maqatal* °uthmān/فتنة مقتل عثمان), “The Fitna of the killing of °Uthmān”, was the first war within the °ummah of °Islām that arose as a result of the killing of the K̥halif, °Uthmān ؓ.

°A°isha ؓ was returning to Madinah from Makkah after Ḥajj when she heard the news of the assassination of °Uthmān ؓ, and the accession of °Alī ؓ to the *k̥hilafat*, whereupon she decided not to go to Madinah, and returned instead to Makkah. Talha and Zubayr also arrived in Makkah. °Uthmān’s ؓ governor in Makkah was °Abdul-lāh bin Āmir Hadrami. Marwan and other members of the Banu Umayyah were staying as his guests. All of them held a meeting and resolved that they would seek vengeance for the blood of °Uthmān ؓ. They raised an army in Makkah of 3,000 warriors, and decided, after some discussion, to march on Baṣra. They occupied Baṣra, seized the treasury, and they killed 600 Muslims whom they suspected to be opposed to them, and spread terror in the city.

No one knows by what right °A°isha ؓ, Talha and Zubayr were seeking vengeance for the blood of °Uthmān ؓ. None of them bore any relationship to °Uthmān ؓ. Each of them belonged to a different clan; his next of kin were his widow, Naila ؓ, and his sons and daughters, and they were not seeking vengeance from anyone.

I write this without seeking to enter into who was or wasn’t at fault or to enter into any form of polemic with anyone but simply to factually put in words something which happened in the early days of °Islām which profoundly changed °Islām just as, in a different way and as a distant cognate, America was changed by 9/11.

Against that event and what followed I would like the reader or listener to consider the following Qur’ānic °āyāts and aḥadīth:

قُلْ لِلّٰهِ ۚ كَتَبَ عَلٰی نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

qul li-llāhi kataba °ala nafsih-r-rahmah

say; ‘Your Lord has written Mercy on Himself.’

(Sūrah al-An’am 6:12)

“yā °ibādiyy °inni ḥarramtu-d̥ḥ-d̥ḥulma °alā nafsiy wa ja°altuhu baynakum muḥarraman, fa lā taḍḥālamū.”

“Oh My worshippers, I have forbidden myself oppression and I have made it forbidden between you, so do not oppress one another.”

Muslim

When?

and regarding the Prophet ﷺ

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

wa mā °arslanāka °illā raḥmatal-li-l-°ālamīn

and We have not sent you except as a Mercy to all the Worlds

(Sūrah al-°Ambiyā° 21:107)



and regarding the °Ummah of °Islām

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيُكُونَ الرِّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ؕ

wa kadḥalika ja°alnakum °ummatan wasaṭan li-takūnū shuhadā°u

°ala-n-nāsi wa yakūna-r-rasūlu °alaykum shahīdā

Like that We made you a Community of the Middle Way

that you might be witnesses over the people,

and the Messenger a witness over yourselves...

(Sūratu-l-l-Baqarah 2:143)

to be read in conjunction with the °āyāt,

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ
وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ؕ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

wa-l-takun minkum °ummatun yad°ūna °ila-l-khayri

wa ya°murūna bi-l-ma°rūfi wa yanhawna °ani-l-munkar;

wa °ūla°ika humu-l-muflihūn

“Let there arise from you a community inviting to all that is good,
enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong:

they are the ones to attain success”

(Sūrah °Āl °Imrān 3:104)



ذِينَ لِلّٰهِ يَبْتَغُوْنَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا ؕ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ

°udḥina lī-l-ladḥīna yuqatalūna bi-°annahum ḍḥulimū

wa-°inna-llāha °ala naṣrihim laqadīrun

Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against
because they have been wronged

— truly Allah has the power to come to their support —

(Sūratu-l-Ḥajj 22:39)

When?

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يَقَاتِلُوا نَكْرًا وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

wa qatilū fī sabīli-llāhi-l-laḥīna yuqatilīnakum
wa la taʿtadū ʾinna-llāha lā yuhibbu-l-muʿtadīn

Fight in the Way of Allāh against those who fight you,
but do not go beyond the limits.

Allāh does not love those who exceed the limits.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:190)



Bashār al-ʾAssad praying with the ʿUlemā while Homs is being shelled.

According to the well known ḥadīth in Tirmidhī: “A Muslim is the one from whose hands and tongue *all* other Muslims are safe.” Yet right now in the world in which we are living Muslims are not only not safe from other Muslims but Muslims are killing each other by the thousands in Libya, in Syria, in Yemen, in Somalia, in Baḥrayn, in Mali; and in Afghanistan more Muslims have died at the hands of other Muslims than at the hands of the ISAF invaders.

And when we go back to our history we find that this is not in any way a recent phenomena but rather, as the story of the First Fitnah makes clear, it has been standard operating procedure from that time and even earlier if you choose to understand that the wars of ʿAmru ibn al-ʿĀs carried out during the Khalifate of ʿUmar رضي الله عنه against Egypt could hardly be considered defensive, considering that Egypt had only sent the Prophet ﷺ honey, a mule and a wife, not an army.

When?

If one looks at what Allāh ﷻ says we find He says: “Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against because they have been wronged.” (23:29) but it hard to see how we were wronged by the Egyptians unless you consider them as extensions of the Byzantines who actually had attacked the Muslims on many occasions.

Such an idea may be considered as anathema to Muslims and as disrespect to a Companion ﷺ, but that is because they are not really looking at events that happened like the death of Muḥammad bin Abi Bakr ؓ who was appointed by °Alī ؓ as Governor of Egypt. Mu°āwīyyah disagreed and ordered his death by the army of °Amru ibn al-°Ās, after which his dead body was tied up in the skin of a donkey and then burnt, which in led in turn to °A°isha ؓ forever cursing Mu°āwīyyah and °Amru ibn al-°Ās after all her prayers.

Now many things like this happened after the death of the Prophet ﷺ which were completely at odds with the teaching of Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ. For the most part these things remain undiscussed and swept under the carpet to preserve unity in the community and we, especially new Muslims, are fed bromides like:

“°Islām is simple.” “Its just a matter of praying five times a day.” Such messages create a disastrous and tragic misconception that reduces °Islām to simply performing ritual acts of worship – the pillars – thus robbing °Islām of much of the rest of the building. A very important and integral section of that building deals with our social relations. It is concerned with how we behave in the family. How we interact with relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and all the rest of humanity. It is well known that the cornerstone of Islamic teachings is the requirement that we do not cause anyone any hurt through our words or actions, but whilst many people pray five times a day where is the fullness of the *sunnah* practiced today? Theory remains far from the practice. I urge readers to get hold of a book called *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* by Wilfred Madelung, the German orientalist scholar who teaches at Oxford, which is available in paperback, and read it carefully so as to better understand the history of early °Islām and what happened and how things went the way they have.

There is a well worn *bon mot* which goes, “Those who don’t know their history are condemned to repeat it.” Again I am not interested in polemic but I am very interested in Muslims understanding what actually happened in the °ummah after the death of Muḥammad ﷺ.

When?

And one of the main reasons for this interest is that what we are hearing on so many tongues today is the question, ‘When?’, because our situation has become so intolerable, and unfortunately people are looking for a magic bullet that they usually call the Mahdī ﷺ which, like the Christian belief in the return of Jesus², will change everything, as though the word of Allāh ﷻ in Sūratu-r-Ra‘d meant nothing and because, in truth, they do not really want to consider the deep and profound implications of these words:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغَيِّرُ مَا بَقِيَ مَرَحْنِي يَغَيِّرُ وَمَا بَأْنَفْسِهِ ؕ
وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءَ أَفْلَاحٍ مَرَدَلُ ؕ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

‘inna-llaha la yughayyiru mā bi-qawmin

hatta yughayyirū mā bi-añfusihi

wa-‘idha ‘ārada-llāhu bi-qawmin sū‘an fa-lā maradda lahu

wa mā lahum miñ dūnihi min wālī

Allāh never changes the state of a people
until they change what is in themselves.

When Allāh desires evil for a people, there is no averting it.

They have no protector apart from Him.

(Sūratu-r-Ra‘d 13:11)

When we look at the world around us and the terrible tragedies unfolding the Muslim world it is obvious that the center no longer holds, as in the poem of William Butler Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand

2. I purposely don’t used the name ‘Isā ﷺ becasue the Christian Mediterannean Pagan figure “Jesus” is simply not the same being as ‘Isā ﷺ.

When?

But what we see is not something that is recently born, something new, something that just happened, but rather it is the result of a long trail of events that began when the Prophet ﷺ died and, in Truth, was lying latent in the community from the very beginning.

And when we say "the community" or the "ummah" we do not mean just the Muslim community but all communities, though it is worse for the Muslim community because Allāh ﷻ said of us:

الْيَوْمَ اكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ
وَأَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

al-yawma 'akmaltu lakum dīnakum

wa 'atmamtu 'alaykum ni'matī wa raḍītu lakumu-l-ʾislāma dīnā

Today I have perfected your religion (*dīn*) for you
and completed My blessing upon you
and willed that self-surrender shall be your Dīn

(Sūrtau-l-Maʾidah 5:3)



This ʾāyāt was revealed during the great day of Ḥajj which is the Day of Standing at ʿArafah. When it was revealed ʿUmar ؓ cried. The Prophet ﷺ said, "What makes you cry" ʿUmar ؓ said, "What made me cry is that our religion is being perfected for us. Now it is perfect but nothing is perfect but it is bound to deteriorate." The Prophet ﷺ said, "You have spoken the truth." (Bukḥārī and Aḥmad)

Two months later the Prophet ﷺ was dead and what caused ʿUmar ؓ to weep became a reality year by year, century by century until we reach the present times where we see Muslims cursing each other, *takfiring* each other and killing each other everywhere and the rulers and the leaders from one end of the Muslim world to the other are corrupt tyrants and corrupters and many of the ʿulemā and even some of the ṣhuyūkh have followed them in their filthy ways.

Greed and fear, simulation and stimulation coupled with a constant restlessness and non-ending dissatisfaction stalk the land. The false is taken as real, the bad is thought of as good and being good and doing good is a joke and getting rich is the ultimate desire of most.

And those who have remained true and those who continue to do the good and forbid the evil and who stand up for peace and justice and mercy and love are everywhere at a loss.

When?

Even the hypocrite (*munāfiq*/منافق) who is more dangerous to Muslims than the worst non-Muslim enemy because he/she prays and outwardly practices ʿIslām, while inwardly concealing his/her disbelief is at loss and is crying for help and of them Allāh ﷻ says,

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الدَّرَكِ الْأَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَلَنْ يَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا

°inna-l-munafiqīna fi-l-d-darki-l-°āsfali mina-n-nāri
wa lan tajida lahum nasīran

The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire:
no helper will they find
(Sūratu-n-n-Nisā° 4:145)



This is our time. The time of our lives. And what now is left of our lives. All of the windows are burning. Our people live under occupation, under the gun, under suspicion. Humiliation is our daily bread. Our houses are destroyed above our heads by drones flown from thousands of miles away. Strange testosterone engorged boymen come to the doors of our houses by night and break them down, rape our wives and our daughters, kill our old men and women, pee on them and set them alight, destroy our fruit trees, trample our crops, kill our animals and poison our wells and burn the Qurʿān.

And we are hopeless and helpless and the bombs fall down like acid rain and everywhere is war even in gated communities. Because if you think this is only happening some place far away then consider that Shaima al-Awadi, an Iraqi immigrant and mother of five, was brutally beaten to death in her suburban Southern California home.

When?

According to her daughter, a note was left close by her mother's body which called the family "terrorists" and said "go back to your country." This happened on the 25th of March in 2012.

Everywhere the people are crying. And they are crying not only because of the blatant and outright injustice and aggression that can so easily be seen, but the deeper injustice and aggression which is killing life on this planet due to the unrelenting greed of the 1% and the corporations which is filling our air with pollutants to the point that some days people have to be cautioned not to go outdoors, to the poisoned oceans and the depleted fish stocks, to the destruction of the fragile marshes and the deforestation of the mountain slopes, to the blowing up of mountain tops and scraping the plateaus of shale and tar sands, fracking of the aquifers, poisoning the water and sucking out the gas. Everywhere is greed. Everywhere is war. Everywhere is death. And the people are crying, crying! And asking when? When? Where is peace? When is justice? Where is mercy?



When?

“Even if the entire duration of the world’s existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left before the Day of Judgment, so Allāh will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of a person out of Ahlu-l-Bayt who will be called by my name and my father’s name. He will then fill the Earth with peace and justice as it will have been filled with injustice and tyranny before then.” (Ṣāḥih Tirmidhī, V2, P86, V9, P74–75)

Umm Salamah رضي الله عنها reported, “I heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say: “The Mahdī is of my lineage and family.” (Sunan Abu Dawud, 11/373; Sunan Ibn Maajah, 2/1368)

“I am al-Mahdī (the guided one), I am the °Imām of the time, and I am the one who fills it (the Earth) with justice just as it was filled with injustice and tyranny.” (Majlisi, *Bihārul Anwār*, vol.52)

“Truly, I am a safeguard to the dwellers on earth as the stars are safeguards to the dwellers in heaven.” (Majlisi, *Bihārul Anwār*, v.78)

This prophecy concerning a rightly guided man who will come and fill the earth with justice and put an end to injustice and tyranny has led to two compelling, if very different, narratives concerning the circumstances and timings under which this so deeply awaited and longed for appearance will take place.

For the Sunnī community it is told through °aḥādīth such as this:

Hudḥaifah رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

“Prophethood (meaning himself ﷺ) will remain with you for as long as Allāh wills it to remain, then Allāh will raise it up wherever he wills to raise it up. Afterwards, there will be a Kḥilāfah (الخلافة) that follows the guidance of Prophethood remaining with you for as long as Allāh wills it to remain. Then, He will raise it up whenever He wills to raise it up. Afterwards, there will be a reign of violently oppressive rule [The reign of Muslim kings who are partially unjust] and it will remain with you for as long as Allāh wills it to remain. Then, there will be a reign of tyrannical rule and it too will remain for as long as Allāh wills it to remain. Then, Allāh will roll it up when-ever He wills to roll it up. Then, there will again be a Kḥalīfah (خليفة) that follows the guidance of Prophethood.”

The Prophet ﷺ also mentioned elsewhere that just before the end of this world, the Muslim nation will be ruled by a Kḥalīfah that will follow the same guidance sent with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

When?

Hudḥaifah ؓ said, after recounting the longer ḥadīth above, “The Prophet ﷺ stopped speaking.” (*as-Silsilah as-Ṣāḥihah*, vol. 1, # 5)

Looking at this ḥadīth we can see that the Prophet ﷺ divided the history of the the future Muslim nation into the following stages:

1. His ﷺ own period of leadership followed by:
2. A Caliphate (*Khilāfah*) that leads according to the guidance revealed to the Prophet ﷺ. Historically this period is called the reign of the rightly guided khulafā° (*al-khulafā°u-r-rāshidūn/الخلافة الراشدة*), starting with °Abu Bakr ؓ, then °Umar ؓ, then Uṭhmān ؓ and ending with the murder of °Alī bin °Abi Ṭālib ؓ. Some scholars include the short reign of al-Ḥasan bin °Alī ؓ, the first grandson of the Prophet ﷺ. These are the thirty years which the Prophet ﷺ earlier stated comprised the reign of the rightly guided khulafā° ؓ in an ḥadīth in which he ﷺ said, “The Khilāfah will remain in my nation after me for thirty years. It will be a monarchy after that.” Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Ṣāḥih al-Jamī° as-Saghir no. 3341].
3. The next period is that of unjust rule. This reign contains some injustice to a varying degree between one king and another. This period started after al-Ḥasan bin °Alī ؓ and includes the Umayyad, the Abbasid, the Mamluks, the Mughals etc. up to the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century. In short this period includes all the states that ruled in the Muslim World during those centuries.
4. The next period is that of tyrannical rule which includes all the regimes, whether controlled by Muslims or non-Muslims, that ruled the Muslim World after the World Wars; imperial or party oriented; secular, populist, socialist, or republican; monarchies or dictatorships all of which who sought to deny Allāh ﷻ His just position as the Sole Legislator in all matters of life and religion.

Those who will strive to establish a new righteous period are the strangers or the *ghurabā°* (الغريباء), as the Prophet ﷺ called them, who will practice the *Dīn* (religion) with knowledge, comprehension and determination and willingly sacrifice their well-being, facing hardship and persecution with patience and steadfastness. Until the final period in which the Mahdī ؑ comes, the *Dīn* will be ‘strange’, as in its beginnings in Makkah. It will be strange (*gharīb/غريب*) to masters and servants, the powerful and the weak, the educated and non-educated, including men, women, and children.

When?

The strangers or the *ghurabā'* are they who, by the will of Allāh ﷻ, will attempt to correct that which people have altered and changed of the sunnah (way of being) of the Prophet ﷺ after his departure from this earthly life. They will fight in the struggle (*jihād*) of Allāh ﷻ against those who oppress them. They will be unrelenting even in the face of those who abandon or defy them, until Allāh ﷻ brings about His Decree, while they remain steadfast on the path.

At this point, when Allāh ﷻ brings about *His* Decree and *His* Law and *His* Prescriptions over those of the unbelievers and deniers,

وَدِّينَ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهَرَ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ ۖ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

wa dīni-l-ḥaqqi liyuḍḥhirahu °ala-d-dīni kullih:
wa kafa bi-llāhi shahīdā

The Religion of Truth (shall be) exalted over every other dīn
and Allāh suffices as a witness.

(Sūratu-l-Faṭḥ 48:28)

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِّينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهَرَ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ
كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

huwa °alladhī °arsala rasūlahu bi-l-huda wa dīni-l-ḥaqqi
liyuḍḥhirahu °ala-d-dīni kullih wa law kariha-l-mushrikūn

It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance
and the *Dīn* of Truth to exalt it over every other dīn,
even though the idolaters detest it.

(Sūrau-l-Tawbah 9:33)

In Sunni thought it is al-Mahdī, the Rightly Guided (مهدي) ﷺ, who, when Allāh ﷻ brings about His Decree, will rule for seven, nine or nineteen years (according to various interpretations) before the Day of Judgment or the Day of Resurrection (*yawmu-l-qiyamah* / يوم القيامة) and will rid the world of wrongdoing, injustice and tyranny.

Though there are many purely spiritual or eschatological views of al-Mahdī ﷺ, as the Muslim world has descended into secular modernist thought tinged with religious fervor, we find very strange views such as that of the modernist Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979), the Pakistani revivalist, who stated that the Mahdī ﷺ will be a “modern Islamic reformer/statesman, who will unite the °Ummah and revolutionise the world according to the ideology of °Islām.”

When?

The Shī'āh narrative concerning al-Mahdī ؑ shares some commonality with the Sunni narrative but, in fact and truth, and in spite of the commonality, is in reality a very different view.

In Shī'āh ʾIslām it is the belief of the ʾIthnā'ashariyyah or Twelvers that al-Mahdī ؑ is Muḥammad al-Mahdī ؑ, the Twelfth ʾImām, who was born in 869 CE and was hidden by Allāh ﷻ at the age of five and is still alive but has been in occultation or “hiddenness”, awaiting the time that Allāh ﷻ has decreed for his return, When that time comes the promise is that no one who wanted happiness will be denied and no one who believed will be left behind.

According to Shī'āh traditions, al-Mahdī ؑ is a young man of medium stature with a handsome face and black hair and beard.

His manifestation will come in an even numbered year and he will appear in Mecca between the corner of the Ka'bah and the Station (*maqām*) of ʾIbārāhīm ؑ where people will see him in the company of his chosen ones. He will have many enemies who will be led by the one-eyed Dajjāl. The two armies will fight an apocalyptic battle in the western outskirts of al-Quds near Lod (لُدّ/اللد) in which al-Mahdī ؑ and his forces will prevail over Dajjāl and the evil ones.

Of al-Mahdī ؑ the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“al-Mahdī is the protector of knowledge, the heir to the knowledge of all the prophets, and he is aware of all things.” [*Bihar al-Anwar*]

“The authority of the Mahdī is one of the proofs that Allāh has created all things; these are so numerous that al-Mahdī's proofs will overcome everyone and in the end nobody will be able to say anything to contradict him.” (Baqr al-Majlisi 2003: 70)

In the beginning “People will flee from him as sheep flee from the shepherd. Later, people will begin to look for a purifier. But since they can find none to help them but him, they will begin to run to him. (*Bihar al-Anwar*: 52: 326)

ʾImām Muhammad al-Baqir ؑ said of al-Mahdī ؑ:

“The Master of the Command was named al-Mahdī because he will dig up the Torah and other heavenly books from a cave in Antioch. He will judge among the people of the Torah according to the Torah; among the people of the Gospel according to the Gospel; among the people of the Psalms according to the Psalms; among the people of the Qurʾān according to the Qurʾān.”

When?

Abu Bashīr says: When I asked ʿImām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq عليه السلام, “Oh son of the Messenger of Allāh! Who is the Mahdī of Ahlu-l-Bayt?”, he replied: “The Mahdī is he who will conquer the world; at that time the world will be illuminated by the light of Allāh, and everywhere in which those other than Allāh are worshipped will become places where Allāh is worshiped; and even if the polytheists do not wish it, the only *Dīn* (religion) on that day will be the *Dīn* of Allāh. (*Bihar al-Anwar*: 51: 146)

The fact, that according to ʿIthnāʿashariyyah (اثنا عشرية) Shīʿāh calculations, he is the twelfth ʿImām in line from the Prophet ﷺ, is very significant in view of the hadīth from Ṣāḥiḥ al-Bukhārī narrated by Jabir bin Samura رضي الله عنه; “ʿIslām will continue to be strong up to twelve Muslim rulers.” He then said a sentence which I did not hear. My father said, “All of them (those rulers) will be from Quraysh.”

To support the claims of al-Mahdī عليه السلام, the ʿIthnāʿashariyyah quote the following Hadith: “I and ʿAlī are the fathers of this nation; whoever knows us very well also knows Allāh, and whoever denies us also denies Allāh, the Unique, the Mighty. And from the descendants of ʿAlī are my grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, who are the masters of the youths of Paradise, and from the descendants of al-Ḥusayn there shall be nine: whoever obeys them obeys me, and whoever disobeys them also disobeys me; the ninth among them is their Qāʾim (He Who Rises / القائم) and al-Mahdī (Rightly Guided).”

[It is understood from the traditions that among the blessed names of the twelfth ʿImām, may Allāh ﷻ hasten his return are: Qāʾim (He Who Rises), al-Mahdī (The Rightly Guided), al-Ḡhayb (The Absent or Unseen), and al-Ḥujjat (The Proof). Regarding the view that the twelfth ʿImām is the same as al-Mahdī عليه السلام and al-Mahdī عليه السلام is no different from the twelfth ʿImām, some eminent Sunni scholars agree with the Shīʿāh. For this very reason individuals like ʿAbū Dāwūd – author of *as-Sunan* (Prophetic Character) – have narrated traditions of the twelve ʿImāms عليهم السلام, including their titles, and al-Mahdī عليه السلام being foretold or promised by many of the Prophets عليهم السلام and his personal excellencies and genealogy are referred to.]

And it has been explicitly mentioned in *mutawatir* traditions that the ʿImāms are twelve personages, all of whom are from the Ahlu-l-Bayt of the Prophet ﷺ, and eleven of them are from the progeny of ʿAlī and Fatimah عليها السلام.

When?

The first of them being Amir al-Mu^ʿminīn ﷺ, and after him ^ʿImām Ḥasan al-Mujtaba ﷺ, followed by the Prince of Martyrs ^ʿImām al-Ḥusayn ﷺ, and after him nine people from his progeny, of whom the ninth – who is the twelfth Imam – is ^ʿImām al-Mahdī ﷺ.

As for the issue that “Whoever dies without recognizing the Imām of his time dies the death of ignorance,” this is also a principle which reliable traditions have conveyed explicitly. The reliable traditions of *Ṭḥaqalayn*³ (the two weighty things), *Safinah an-Najah*⁴ (the ship of salvation) and safety (^ʿ*āmān*/أمان) all indicate this point.

So, whilst there are some major differences in Sunni and Shī^ʿāh understanding concerning al-Mahdī ﷺ, arguably the most important being whether he is alive and in occlusion or in another world or state waiting to rise or simply waiting to be born, both Sunni and Shī^ʿāh agree on his existence and that his coming will put an end to the injustice, tyranny and corruption which beset the world.

Also, and very importantly as will become obvious shortly, the return or the advent of al-Mahdī ﷺ for both Sunni and Shī^ʿā is closely connected to the events known as The Signs of the Time and the End of the World and Time as we know it.

There are various signs (as many as up to 100) given in both Qur^ʾān and Sunnah for the coming of Judgment Day or Yawm al-Qiyāmah.

The exact time when these events are to occur is not specified; however, there are said to be signs which will occur near the end of time of (*qiyamah*/القيامة). These signs can be divided into two parts, major and minor.

The major signs include but are not limited to:

3. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things (*ṭḥaqalayn*) among you: the Book of Allāh and my kindred (*itrah*), my household Ahlu-l-Bayt, for indeed, the two will never separate until they come back to me by the Pond (of *al-Kawthar*) (Ṣāḥiḥ Muslim)”
4. The Prophet ﷺ has compared his Ahlu-l-Bayt to the Ark of Nūḥ ﷺ. Whoever loves and follows them will attain salvation and whoever violates their sanctity will drown. Once while clinging to the threshold of the door of the Holy Ka^ʿbah, ^ʿAbū Dharr ؓ told that he had heard Prophet Muhammad ﷺ say, “My family among you is like Ark of Nūḥ ﷺ. He who sails in it will be safe, but he who holds back from it will perish.” (*al-Sawa^ʿiq al-Muhriqah*, by Ibn Hajar, p.91)

When?

1. When you see people entering the dīn of Allāh ﷻ in multitudes. (Sūratu-n-Naṣr, 110:1-2)
2. The coming of the evil one-eyed Dajjal.
3. The comings of °Imām al-Mahdī ؑ and then Prophet °Isā ؑ who will combine the forces of good against evil (43:61)
4. The appearance of the *Dabbat al-arḍ* or the strange beast.
5. Two blowings of the Trumpet and minor signs preceding them.
6. The Earth will experience an earthquake that will cause mountains to crash down. The Earth's inner body will break out, and the Earth will be stretched out and flattened. (99:1, 69:13-14, 70:8, 84:3-4, 20:105-107, 99:1-6).
7. Major earthquakes will be experienced in the East, the West, and one in the Arabian Peninsula
8. Jūj (*Gog*) and Majūj (*Magog*) will be released and will destroy the crops, animals, water and kill everything.
9. Smoke will spread and cause non-believers to fall ill whereas the believers will catch a mere cold. Later, Allāh ﷻ will send a cool wind, gently taking the life from all of the believers, leaving only the unbelievers (*kufār*/كُفَّار) to actually see and experience the last day which is the Day Of Judgment.



This eschatology concerned with the Yawm al-Qiyāmah (the Day of Resurrection or The Standing Forth from the Graves/يوم القيامة) sometimes termed Yawm ad-Dīn (Day of Judgment or the Day when the Debt Comes Due/يوم الدين) and the final judgment of humanity is one of the six articles of faith (°aqidah/عقيدة) in the Dīn of al-°Islām.

All of these points, and some ninety more, are intimately connected with the subject of *when*, but here we are focussing specifically on the comings of °Imām al-Mahdī ؑ and then Prophet °Isā ؑ who will combine their forces against evil.

وَإِنَّمَا لَعَلُّ السَّاعَةِ فَلَا تَمْتَرُنْ بِهَا وَاتَّبِعُونِ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

wa-°innahu la°ilmun li-s-sa°ati fa lā tamtarunna bihā wa-°ittabi°un;
hadḥa ṣirāṭun mustaqīm

He is a Sign of the Hour. Have no doubt about it. But follow me.

This is a straight path.

(Sūratu-z-Zukhrūf 43:61)

When?

[Many verses, specifically 31/34, 33/63, 41/47, 43/85 and also 6/31, 40 7/187 12/107 15/85 16/77 18/21 19/75 20/15 21/49 22/1, 7, 55 25/11 30/12, 14, 55 34/3 40/46, 59 41/50 42/17, 18 45/27, 32 47/18 54/1, 46 79/42 as well as numerous other ʾāyāt emphasize the reality of the Hour and discuss the events to occur on Yawm al-Qiyāmah.]

What we can see from the Sunni and Shīʿah perspective is that all of this is tied up and connected with the Yawm al-Qiyāmah, which is to say the end of the world as we know it and time as it manifests.

So in terms of our immediate and obvious ‘problem’, which is the rampant corruption and evil manifest in the world at the present time (and as far we know for most of time), there is nothing we can ‘do’ but wait or else, on whatever level, follow the example of Sayyidna-l-Ḥusayn ؑ and refuse to cooperate with the forces of corruption or else, possibly, try to practice, as they say, small acts of kindness which might involve, for instance, such disparate acts as volunteering in disaster areas to provide needed help and assistance, serving homeless people or the poor, teaching children how to read and excel in their school work or any such similar activities.

But...and this is a big but...we are, in this way of thinking, for the most part, reduced to waiting and trying to be the best kind of Muslim in the interim – and by best kind of Muslim I mean – the kind of Muslim who really tries to obey the commands of Allāh ﷻ scrupulously (*al-waraʿ*/الـورع) and follows the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ specifically in regards to this ʾāyat

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

wa mā ʾarslanāka ʾillā raḥmatal-li-l-ʿālamīn

and We have not sent you except as a Mercy to all the Worlds
(Sūrah al-ʾAmbiyāʾ 21:107)

by being, to the best of our individual ability, the Mercy to those around us regardless of who or what or why or where or when.

But until the world and time comes to an end one is always waiting and one will remain always waiting and the injustice and inequity, corruption; cruelty, tyranny, repression, exploitation, bias, prejudice, discrimination, intolerance will go on without stint or let.

What to do?

al-ḥamdulillāh there is another way — the way of the ṣūfis.

When?

موت قبل أنت يموت

Mutu qabla anta yamut

Die before you die!

الناس نيام، إذا يموتون، انهم مستيقظا

People are asleep and when they die, they awake.

(Muhyiddin Ibn al-ʿArabi, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, p. 220)



Here we reach the most subtle of points regarding the possibility of seeing and knowing the Hidden ʾImām, al-Mahdī ﷺ.

As we previously noted, according to Sunni and Shīʿāh texts we will only be able to come into contact with al-Mahdī ﷺ when the world or time as we know it comes, or is about to come, to an end.

Well death *is* the ultimate end both to our relative being and our time.

It follows therefore that in order to come into contact with al-Mahdī ﷺ and, by extension, to enter the world of goodness, fairness, justice, fair play, equity, evenhandedness, impartiality, objectivity, honesty and righteousness, one's time or one's life must come to an end, which is to say one must die.

The question is, can one die and still live and is there life after death?

Fānāʾ (فناء) is about the annihilation or death of the ego. One great Sufi said, "Between You and me there lingers the refrain 'It is I.' Oh Allāh, through Your mercy lift this 'It is I' from between us."

What has to 'die' is this 'I' which separates us from Allāh ﷻ. This is perhaps the most painful part of the spiritual path, because it requires we surrender our ego (*nafs*/نفس) and learn to surrender ourselves totally to Allāh ﷻ. Fānāʾ is a long, slow process—it takes time for the ego to surrender, to step aside, to become annihilated.

Ṣadru-d-Dīn Qunawī (صدر الدين قونوي), one of ʾIbn ʿArabi's ﷺ students, writes: "It is inconceivable that one thing should love another thing in the respect that thing differs from it. It can only love that thing as a result of the property of some meaning shared between the two of them, in respect of which an affinity is established between them which will lead to the domination of the property of that which brings about unification over the properties which brings about differentiation. In the end love is unity and Being is one."

When?

This idea is not very much liked by the literalists and the exoterists who hold that, since *fanā'* is mentioned neither in the Qur'ān nor in the Sunnah, it is a Šūfī gimmick, a cheap trick and a satanic deception, originally thought up by mystics among the Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians to adulterate the great religion of 'Islām.

But for those who can see within the outer form of the *Dīn* the nature of *fanā'* consists in the elimination of evil deeds and lowly attributes of the flesh. In other words, *fanā'* is abstention from sin and the expulsion from the heart of all love other than the Divine Love; expulsion of greed, lust, desire, vanity, show, etc. In the state of *fanā'* the reality of the true and only relationship asserts itself in the heart. One realizes and knows that the only real relationship is with Allāh ﷻ. *Fanā'* means to destroy your self. If you destroy your self in the love of Allāh ﷻ then that *fanā'* will convert into true life but *only* if you destroy your will and self in the will of Allāh ﷻ.

This work of what is essentially self destruction requires, in addition to the presence of the 'ilm upon which rests firm knowledge of the *ḍhahir* and the *bāṭin* – the outer and the inner – both perpetual combat and continuous initiation on the part of the way goer.

°Alī ؑ says, “Our teaching is difficult, particularly arduous, exasperating, distressing. Those who can bear this teaching are only an angel drawn close (المُقَرَّبِينَ), a messenger Prophet (*rasūl*/رسول) or a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh for the faith.”

Again in another place he ؑ says, “Indeed our work is severe and intense. It cannot be withstood save by a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh. None can comprehend our talk save trustworthy hearts and those with a serious temperament.”

Ja°far aš-Šādiq ؑ said, “Even a Prophet ؑ among the Prophets ؑ may be tested with thirst till he dies thirsty; even a Prophet ؑ among the Prophets ؑ may be tested in a deserted place till he dies naked and alone; even a Prophet ؑ among the Prophets ؑ may be tested with diseases and illness till he dies of disease; even a Prophet ؑ among the Prophets ؑ may come to his people, stay with them to enjoin upon them the obedience of Allāh ﷻ, and call them to the absolute unity of Allāh ﷻ, and yet he may not be spared for a night nor given an opportunity to complete his speech nor even be given a patient listening before he is killed. Certainly, Allāh ﷻ tests his servants ؑ according to His ﷻ estimate of their station.”

When?

How, one may ask, does this relate to al-Mahdī ؑ, the Hidden ʾImām of the Age and the coming of the end of time?

It does so by bringing your time consciously to an end, making it possible to ‘see’ or, better, ‘encounter’ the Hidden ʾImām ؑ as the personification of light, love, peace, mercy, goodness, fairness, justice, fair play, equity, evenhandedness, impartiality, objectivity, honesty and righteousness and, in terms of his being the ʾImam of the Time ؑ, it marks the end, if not on a world wide universal level at least in one’s limited self, of injustice and inequity, corruption; cruelty, tyranny, repression, exploitation, bias, prejudice, discrimination, intolerance in the self and, by extension, in one’s own interpersonal transactions beginning with those who are closest and extending outward into the community and, finally, the commonweal.

The next question is, how exactly is the ʾImām ؑ seen or known?

The ʾImām of the Time is always ‘seen’ or, better, ‘encountered’ as a face or presence (*wajh*) of light; a luminous spiritual form in the subtle center of the heart where the Hidden ʾImām ؑ is “encountered”, as M.A. Amir-Moezzi puts it, “in a state of deep contemplation often accompanied by the revelation of secret knowledge of a higher order that carries one into a profound and beatific state.”

Mullah Taqi al-Majlisi wrote, “It is as though I tasted death and returned to my Lord due to the overwhelming presence and his ؑ blessed light.”

Or as in the well known ḥadīth of ʿAli ibn Abi Ṭalib ؑ, “To know me as Light (*nūr*) is to know Allāh and to know Allāh is to know me as Light. He who knows me as Light is a believer whose heart Allāh has tested for faith (*li-l-ʾimān*).”

The Prophet ﷺ himself used to supplicate Allāh ﷻ to make him to be Light by saying; “Oh Allāh, place Light in my heart, and Light in my soul, Light upon my tongue, Light in my ears. Place Light to my right and Light to my left, Light behind me and Light before me, Light above me and Light beneath me. Place Light in my nerves and Light in my flesh, Light in my blood, Light in my hair and Light in my skin! Give me Light, increase my Light and make me be Light!”

In a section of the Prayer during the ʾImām’s Hiddenness, it says, “Oh Lord show us eternally his ؑ Light which has no shadow and by which dead hearts are revived.”

When?

Our cause is a secret (*sirr*/سِرّ), a secret contained in a secret, a secret that has been made secret, a secret on the subject of a secret.

Sayyidina ʿAli ؑ says, “By Allāh, you will be smashed like dry clay and clay once broken does not return to what it was. By Allāh, you shall be tested and clearly distinguished from one another. By Allāh you will be purified entirely until only a few of you remain.

“The true believers are only a small minority and a true believing woman (*muʿminina*) is rarer than a true believing man (*muʿmin*) and true believing men are rarer than red sulphur; most men are animals save a handful of true believers (*ʿillā qalilan min al-muʿminīn*) and the true believer is a stranger. Simply saying you love us (*walāya*) will not turn you into a true believer.”

This is to return to the beginning and the understanding that until this takes place, the *Dīn* will seem strange, the same way the *Dīn* appeared in Makkah as something strange to masters and slaves, the powerful and the weak, men, women and children save for those for whom time had come to an end, for the ʾImam ؑ, both then and now, only appears to one whose time has run out and come to an end and is here and now in that hereafter (*al-maʿād*/المعاد) which is ever present. Only those who understand that the ʾāyāt:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ • ارجعي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي • وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

yā ʾayuhā-n-nafsu-l-muṭmaʾinah •

ʾirjiʿī ʾilā rabbika rāḍiyatan marḍiyyah •

fadā khulī fī ʿibādī • wa-ʾadākhulī jannatī •

Oh you whose self is at peace.

Return to your Lord pleased and well pleasing.

Enter with My worshippers – enter My Garden.

(Sūrah al-Fajr 89: 28-30)

does not refer only to a distant “future” but to the here and now will comprehend what we are referring to. Those who insist upon deferring to that future, Sunni or Shiʿah, will have to wait for that future to become the present to know the truth of the Hidden ʾImām, al-Mahdī ؑ, whereas those who are prepared to bring time to an end through intense effort, perpetual combat and continuous initiation will have a far different future not to mention here and now.

When?

At the time of the manifestation and the encounter with the ʾImām Allāh ﷺ will place the hand of the Qāʾim in the hand of the faithful believer and their wisdom and knowledge will be complete.

According to Sayyidinā ʿAlī ؑ, “The faithful believers will have their eyes enlightened by the Word of Revelation and their ears will be filled by the explanation of its true meaning. Morning and evening they will drink from the cups of wisdom.” For the end of time marks the restoration of the world as it truly is and actualises the Primordial Initiation which returns the world to the original moment when only wisdom and light filled the universe.”



Certainly for the one who receives this knowledge and participates in this realisation the world is a very different place and time has an altogether different meaning. In a way it is cognate to what we said earlier when we spoke of the Looking Glass world and the one who has fallen down the Rabbit Hole.

When we look around at the world as it professes to be and, specifically, the religious political system that is in control in the Muslim world, be it Sunni of Shīʿah, we see that the *Dīn* has been not only hijacked but it is essentially a clever counterfeit that cannot be spoken of as such without the speaker paying a high penalty.

The *Dīn* has been subject to a process of simulation and substitution in which the compliant fuqahāʾ and ʿulemāʾ have become, in Truth the destroyers and perverters of the *Dīn* of Muḥammad ﷺ as it was transmitted to ʿAlī ؑ and by extension to all those whose ‘hand is in the hand’. The teachings of these servile jurists are an imitation of a fictitious past, have taken the place of those of the Hidden ʾImām, ؑ whose teachings are the teachings of the living Heart firmly and soundly based in the present on the eternal prescriptions of Allāh ﷻ.

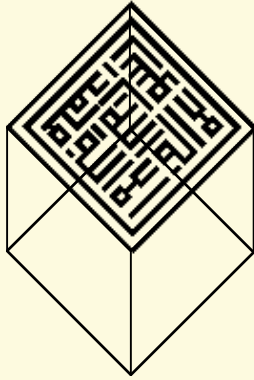
It is they who have made the *Dīn* strange and turned us into strangers and led to the fulfillment of the words of the Prophet ﷺ, “A time will come when there is nothing left of ʾIslām but the name and those who call themselves by it will be the farthest from it; when there will be nothing left of the Qurʾān but the words and those who recite them will be parrots. The masājid will be full of people but empty of goodness and fiṭna will flow out from and back to the fuqahāʾ.”

Allāh ﷻ help us all.

wa-llāhu ʿalim







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